

Message Text

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46

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 AID-05 IGA-02 CIAE-00 COME-00

EB-07 FRB-03 INR-07 NSAE-00 USIA-06 TRSE-00 XMB-02

OPIC-03 SP-02 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 L-03

DOT-00 /069 W

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P R 120850Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8399

INFO AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

USUN NEW YORK 349

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NAIROBI FOR REDSO

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, EAID, EFIN, BC, US

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE TO PAVE BOT-ZAM ROAD

REF: A. GABORONE 1194; B. GABORONE 1208

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF LETTER DATED JULY 9, 1976 FROM PRESIDENT KHAMA TO THE AMBASSADOR REQUESTING U.S. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO PAVE THE NATA-KAZUNGULA LINK OF THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD.

QTE THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD, AS YOU KNOW, HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PROJECT IN THE EYES OF THE BOTSWANA GOVERNMENT FOR MANY YEARS. IN MY MEETING LAST MONTH WITH PRESIDENT FORD WE TALKED ABOUT OUR COMMON CONCERN OVER EVENTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. WE DISCUSSED THE SITUATION IN RHODESIA, THE POLICIES AND AIMS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT AND THE DIVERGENT FORCES AT WORK WHOSE COMBINED EFFECT MAY THROW THE SUB-CONTINENT INTO TURMOIL.

FINALLY, I MENTIONED THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF BOTSWANA AND

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MY CONCERN ABOUT SAFEGUARDING ITS FUTURE IN THE MONTHS TO COME.

IN THIS CONNECTION I STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROAD AND OUR DESIRE THAT I SHOULD BE UPGRADED TO BITUMEN STANDARDS.

QTE SECURITY OF TRANSPORT ROUTES IS IN THE FOREFRONT OF BOTSWANA'S PRESENT PRIORITIES. INDEED, THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPORTATION ROUTES GENERALLY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA WAS MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY IN THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S LUSAKA SPEECH. THE UNITED STATES HAS HELD THIS VIEW FOR MANY YEARS, AND WE HAVE WELCOMED YOUR GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT FOR THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD PROJECT THROUGH ALL STAGES OF ITS DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION. AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE PLACED PERSONAL EMPHASIS ON THIS ROAD AND THE NEED FOR EARLY COMPLETION.

QTE CONSTRUCTION BEGAN IN OCTOBER 1973 AND THE MAIN SECTION OF THE ROAD WILL BE COMPLETED IN TWO MONTHS TIME. THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT NATURALLY, VIEWS THE PROJECT IN THE SAME LIGHT. OUR CONCERN IS THAT ALTHOUGH THE QUALITY OF THE GRAVEL ROAD IS SUFFICIENT FOR MODERATE TRAFFIC FLOWS (SUCH AS WOULD BE GENERATED BY DOMESTIC TRAFFIC AND THE NORMAL GROWTH OF TRADE WITH ZAMBIA), IT IS UNLIKELY TO WITHSTAND HEAVY TRAFFIC, BOTH IN WEIGHT AND NUMBERS.

QTE MAINTENANCE UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS WILL BE EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE. AT THE MOMENT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE TRAFFIC BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA, ZAMBIA AND ZAIRE. PARTLY THIS INVOLVES DIRECT RAIL TRAFFIC BETWEEN SOUTH AFRICA AND ZAIRE THROUGH BOTSWANA AND RHODESIA. IN OTHER CASES, GOODS ARE CONVEYED FROM THE RAIL HEAD AT VICTORIA FALLS BY ROAD TO ZAMBIA THROUGH THE MOST NORTHERN PART OF BOTSWANA AT KASANE. OUR CONCERN IS THAT AS SOON AS THE NEW ROAD IS OPENED AND AS THE WAR IN RHODESIA ESCALATES, MOST OF THIS HEAVY TRAFFIC WILL SWITCH TO ROAD TRANSPORT. THIS MOVE WILL BE EXACERBATED IF THE RUNDOWN IN RHODESIA'S RAILWAY OPERATING CAPACITY OCCURS, AS WE EXPECT. TO RESTRAIN TRAFFIC ON THE NEWLY OPENED ROAD IN ORDER TO PROTECT IT WOULD, WE FEEL, BE INCONSISTENT WITH THE UNDERLYING PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND WOULD BE EMBARRASSING TO THE GOVERNMENT.

QTE LOOKING FURTHER AHEAD, RESTRICTED ACCESS TO SOUTH AFRICAN PORTS, EITHER DUE TO THE DIRECT ACTIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT OR THROUGH INDUSTRIAL STRIFE WITHIN THAT COUNTRY, WILL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THROW INCREASED TRAFFIC ON TO THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD.

QTE THE NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE SUPPLY ROUTES WAS SEEN EARLY IN THE LIFE OF THE PROJECT, AND GIVEN SPECIAL PROMINENCE TWO AND HALF YEARS AGO WHEN WE DISCUSSED OUR EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS IN THE CONTEXT OF WHAT WE TERMESED OUR LIFELINE PROGRAM. THE DOCUMENT WE PREPARED ON THAT OCCASION EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANT OF THE ROAD LINKS AND HELPED THE GOVERNMENT OBTAIN

FINANCE FOR THE FRANCISTOWN-NATA ROAD.

QTE WHEN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL TO TAR THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD WAS DISCUSSED WITH THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SYMPATHY FOR BOTSWANA'S REQUIREMENTS, SOME DOUBT WAS EXPRESSED ON THE TYPE OF EMERGENCY SITUATION DESCRIBED IN THE LIFELINE PROGRAM DOCUMENT. IN PARTICULAR STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS DOUBTED THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE OIL EMBARGO ON SOUTHERN AFRICA BY ARAB OIL PRODUCERS. ALTHOUGH THIS SCEPTICISM WAS PROVED RIGHT, THE THREAT OF EMBARGO HAS BEEN REPLACED BY A MORE SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE AND VAIABILITY OF BOTSWANA. OUR CONCERN ABOUT THE FUTURE OPERATION OF RHODESIA RAILWAYS HAS NOW BEEEN FULLY REGISTERED.

QTE AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL IF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT COULD CONSIDER AFREST THE PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL FINANCE TO TAR THE MAIN SECTION OF THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD. IT IS PROPOSED TO ENGAGE THE PRESENT CONTRACTOR, GROVE INTERNATIONAL, TO CONTINUE ON SITE AND COMPLETE THIS ROAD TO BITUMENT STANDARDS. OUR ENGINEERS IN THE MINISTRY OF WORKS, AFTER STUDYING ANTICIPATED TRAFFIC LEVELS, HAVE RECOMMENDED A DOUBLE CHIP AND BITUMENT SPRAY SEAL AT AN ESTIMATED COST OF \$12 MILLION. THE DESIGN FOR THIS WORK WAS COMPLETED AT THE TIME OF THE FIRST OIL CRISIS. ON THE BASIS OF THE TRAFFIC FIGURES ANTICIPATED WHEN THE LOAN WAS APPROVED, THE RATE OF RETURN FOR THE SURFACE IMPROVEMENTS IS 18PERCENT (BASED ON SAVINGS IN VEHICLE OPERATING COSTS AND MAINTENANCE SAVING). TO THIS MAY BE ADDED THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED.

QTE I WOULD THEREFORE APPRECIATE IT IF THIS LETTER COULD BE REGARDED AS A FORMAL REQUEST FOR FINANCE FOR THE TARRING OF THE NATA-KAZUNGULA SECTION OF THE BOTSWANA-ZAMBIA ROAD.
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QTE YOURS SINCERELY, SERETSE KHAMA, PRESIDENT UNQTE.
BOLEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, HIGHWAYS, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS)
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976GABORO01302
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760267-1046
From: GABORONE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760769/aaaacims.tel
Line Count: 157
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 GABORONE 1194, 76 GABORONE 1208
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 MAY 2004 by ElyME>; APPROVED <19 MAY 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE TO PAVE BOT-ZAM ROAD
TAGS: PFOR, EAID, EFIN, BC, US, ZA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006